

Exporting a British intelligence culture: The British intelligence community and decolonisation, 1945-1960

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This paper considers the preparations made by the British intelligence community to deal with the consequences of rapid decolonisation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The so-called 'Attlee Doctrine' of 1946 had largely prohibited MI6 (SIS) from operating within the British Empire/Commonwealth. Even MI5, the 'domestic' security service, which had overall responsibility for the Commonwealth, was expected to play only an advisory role through its regional Security Liaison Officers (SLOs), leaving the business of intelligence gathering itself to colonial special branches and the security organisations of independent Commonwealth countries. It was hoped that the inculcation of a British 'intelligence culture' in these agencies would ensure that they would continue to cooperate closely with the UK.

It is clear, however, that as early as 1955, agreement in principle was given in Whitehall for a significant change to this arrangement. It was felt that the familiar structure of SLOs and colonial special branches was insufficiently robust to deal with possible challenges to Western influence in the post-independence era, and that MI6 should be allowed an active role. It is equally clear, however, that the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations Offices resisted an expansion of this role. The paper considers the extent to which recently released records of the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD) are able to shed light on the nature of this competition within Whitehall.

We still have a highly incomplete picture of British intelligence operations in the Empire/Commonwealth in the two decades that followed the Second World War. The British Security Service, MI5, has released only a handful of files relevant to this subject, and the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, still refuses to make any documentary material available. We have access to the minutes and papers of the Joint Intelligence Committee, but these have proved surprisingly uninformative on this as on other matters. Most of the work that has hitherto been published on the British intelligence community in the post-war Commonwealth has tended to focus on its role in the major counter-insurgency campaigns in the decolonisation era: the one

area for which a significant amount of documentary material has for some time been available.¹ Less attention has been given to the intelligence community's role in the self-governing Dominions, and in areas that experienced relatively peaceful transfers of power.

Yet the evidence that is available deserves reassessment in the context of a discussion of intelligence cultures, since it is clear that there was a concerted attempt in this period to export a 'British intelligence culture' across the Commonwealth. The immediate impetus behind this was the desire not so much to create a broadly based Commonwealth intelligence community as to preserve and strengthen Anglo-American relations. The UK/USA Agreement of 1947-8 on the sharing of signals intelligence, to which Canada, Australia and New Zealand were also parties, illustrated the value of Britain's 'core' Commonwealth allies to its attempts to foster cooperation with the US.² Yet at the same time, revelations of Soviet infiltration in the Dominions offered the United States a powerful excuse for refusing to share military technology with the UK. The internal security arrangements of those states thus became a matter of direct interest to Britain.

As the pace of decolonisation quickened, however, the dissemination of a British intelligence culture offered new benefits. In territories nearing independence it offered some hope both of enhancing their internal stability and of preserving some degree of residual British influence. The body that was charged with the task of inculcating a British intelligence culture across the Commonwealth was MI5. It was a long-standing convention that the 'domestic' responsibilities of the Security Service embraced the Empire/Commonwealth. The so-called 'Attlee Doctrine' of 1946 had confirmed the prohibition on MI6 conducting operations there.³ MI5's overseas branch – 'E Branch' in the post-war period – maintained contacts with colonial and

Commonwealth governments through Defence Security Officers (DSOs) in the case of military bases and, elsewhere, through Security Liaison Officers (SLOs). MI5 was keen to emphasise to the leaders of colonies nearing independence, that the SLO's role was not to act as a spy on behalf of the British government, but was

to help and support the Special Branch and security authorities to meet the threats to national security which will inevitably follow the grant of independence... Great care is taken by the SLO to guard the confidence and trust of his liaison, and information given to him is not passed on to any other Commonwealth territory without the authority of the originator.⁴

During the years 1948-51, MI5 offered assistance to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in building up their counter-subversion capabilities. In each case, the ultimate aim of the British appears to have been to centralise responsibility for security intelligence gathering into the hands of a single agency, modelled on MI5. In February 1948, the director general of MI5, Sir Percy Sillitoe, led a delegation of offers to Australia. MI5 subsequently drew up plans for what became the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO).⁵ MI5 provided the ASIO with its charter. This stated that,

It is essential that the Security Service should be kept absolutely free from any political bias or influence, and nothing should be done that might lend colour to any suggestion that it is concerned with the interests of any particular section of the community, or with any matters other than the defence of the Commonwealth. You will impress on your staff that they have no connection whatever with any matters of a party political character and that they must be scrupulous to avoid any action which could be so construed.⁶

The text appears to have been drawn from a report on MI5 by Sir Findlater Stewart, submitted in November 1945. When, in September 1952, the British Home Secretary, David Maxwell-Fyfe, sought for the first time formally to define the constitutional position of MI5, his directive to the director general of the Security Service followed the Australian document virtually clause for clause, and repeated, almost verbatim, the section quoted above.⁷ Thereafter, the text became, in effect, the Nicene Creed of the Commonwealth intelligence community. It was the model for the charter of the New Zealand Security Service.⁸ It also formed the basis for a directive issued in 1956 to the head of the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau, the body responsible for coordinating intelligence in the white settler-dominated Central African Federation.⁹

Highly protective of their own independence, Commonwealth governments – even those with the strongest historical links to the UK – did not, however, fall meekly into line with the plans presented to them by MI5. Despite repeated attempts by MI5 to persuade the government of New Zealand to establish a separate security service in its own image, such an organisation did not come into existence until 1956.¹⁰ Perhaps the most difficult problem faced by MI5 in spreading a British ‘intelligence culture’ in the self-governing Dominions came in the Union of South Africa. In November 1949, Sillitoe, paid a personal visit to the country. Once again, he seems to have packed a copy of Sir Findlater Stewart’s report. Briefing Attlee in advance of his trip, he acknowledged that the victory of the National Party the previous year had added further sensitivity to Anglo-South African intelligence contacts. Indeed, he warned that his visit might expose the Security Service to the accusation that MI5 was assisting ‘the Boer nationalists in implementing their extremist political programme by actively helping in the creation of a Gestapo.’¹¹ Nevertheless, Sillitoe suggested that there might still be the possibility of the British

intelligence culture taking root in the Union. Rather touchingly, he told Attlee that he would seek to impress upon the South African Prime Minister that, as head of MI5, he was required to ensure that his own organisation did not act exclusively in the interests of 'any particular section of the community'. 'It is to be hoped' added Sillitoe, apparently without irony, 'that Dr Malan may recognise the correctness of such a directive and copy it'.

Britain also began to concentrate on building up the security apparatus of countries nearing independence. Yet rather than encourage the emergence of MI5-style agencies, as she had sought to do in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, Britain attempted to develop the capacity of police special branches. These were regarded more appropriate for the needs of developing states.¹² In particular, it was hoped that they would encourage the leaders of countries nearing independence to embrace a supposedly essential element of the British world intelligence community's creed: that intelligence gathering was to be carried out solely to preserve the security of the state and not 'for political ends'.¹³ The process of building up special branches was a slow one, and as late as the mid-1950s, there was only a light scattering of trained officers across much of the colonial empire. General Sir Gerald Templer noted this deficiency in his famous report on colonial security, submitted to the government in April 1955. He pointed out that of the 430 colonial officers trained in special branch work since 1950 by MI5, only 'a handful' had come from relatively peaceful areas such as West and Central Africa and the Caribbean. The 'vast majority' had come from the Far East where Britain was continuing to confront the guerrillas of the Malayan Communist Party.¹⁴

New structures were put in place in London to enable the Colonial Office to monitor this process. In June 1954, an MI5 officer, A. M. MacDonald, was seconded

to the Colonial Office to serve as a full-time Security Intelligence Adviser to the Secretary of State, and to coordinate liaison with MI5.¹⁵ In 1955, in response to the recommendations of the Templer report, a separate Intelligence and Security Department was established at the Colonial Office, and MacDonald was provided with two deputies. By November 1957, he and his advisers claimed to have visited 27 colonial territories, to assist in the organisation of local special branches and the training of personnel.¹⁶

A further means of encouraging the development of a common intelligence culture was through Commonwealth Security Conferences. These were inaugurated in July 1948, when Attlee wrote to the premiers of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa to impress upon them the danger from international Communism and to invite them to send representatives of their respective security agencies to a special conference in London.¹⁷ The conference, which coincided with the Commonwealth Premiers' Conference in October 1948, discussed ways of creating 'a uniform standard of security'.¹⁸ There was a further Conference in 1951 to which representatives from India and Pakistan and Ceylon were also invited (despite South African objections). Thereafter, conferences were held once every two years, and included a growing number of intelligence officers from newly independent states. The conference still apparently takes place.¹⁹ The longevity of this institution suggests that its members still see some value in it. Yet Stella Rimington's account of one such Commonwealth Security Conference in the 1990s might make one question the extent to which it brings together agencies with a shared culture. She notes that 'there was earnest discussion of a topic close to the hearts of some of our African colleagues, how to convince governments that there should be continuity of the security service when the government changed – in other words how to prevent the service becoming

the tool of the party in power – an issue which mercifully I never had to contend with.²⁰

MI5 then, did not maintain that its own organisational model was universally applicable across the Commonwealth. It believed that the older self-governing Dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand had sufficiently robust traditions of parliamentary democracy to sustain separate security organisations. Elsewhere (including, to some extent, South Africa), it feared that such bodies might become instruments through which fledgling democracies could be transformed into police states. Here, it concentrated on developing colonial special branches. Nevertheless, MI5 did believe that the *principles* that guided domestic intelligence gathering in Britain were applicable across the Commonwealth. Of these, the most important was that the process should be kept absolutely free from party-political interference.

The structures put in place to coordinate intelligence gathering and inculcate these principles reflected the highly devolved nature of power in the Commonwealth. Even in colonies that had not yet attained self-government, there was mistrust on the part of British administrators of anything that smacked of excessive interference from London. Hence, responsibility for intelligence gathering was vested firmly in the intelligence organisations of the individual states, under the ultimate political supervision of their territorial governments. MI5's local representatives were to have (at least in theory) a purely advisory role, passing back to their superiors in London only what the territorial governments wished to reveal. MI5, would in turn, pass any intelligence it judged to be relevant to the Intelligence and Security Department of the Colonial Office in London. Even in his sweeping recommendations for the reform of colonial intelligence in 1955, General Templer did not recommend any change to this

basic chain of command. He noted that even MI5, which would continue to assist and advise in the colonial territories, would ‘not actually operate’ there.²¹

The hope that Commonwealth intelligence and security organisations – particularly in newly independent states – would continue to be characterised by a ‘British intelligence culture’ might seem in retrospect an unrealistic one. Yet an assumption at the heart of the British government’s whole approach to decolonisation was that that persuasion was ultimately more productive than coercion. In general, officials at the Colonial Office viewed the likelihood of newly independent territories successfully adopting the trappings of British parliamentary democracy with a certain resigned pessimism. They were, however, reluctant to enforce their own ideas of ‘good government’ on states nearing independence. As Frank Heinlein has recently noted, much was made of the need to retain the ‘good will’ of colonial leaders.²² If independence was granted swiftly and without ‘strings’, it was argued, successor regimes would be more likely to retain friendly relations with the former colonial power. Attempts to safeguard those interests through formal agreements, or indeed, to hang on to power in the hope of creating more recognisably pro-British indigenous elites, were likely to generate local resentment and hence prove counter-productive. In the intelligence field, the notion that MI6 might operate directly in the Commonwealth to protect British interests, without the knowledge or consent of Commonwealth governments was anathema to this approach.

Yet in 1955, a major challenge was launched to this essentially non-interventionist philosophy. It came initially from the Chiefs of Staff in what the Cabinet Secretary, Norman Brook, described as a ‘rather feverish and muddled’ report, calling for ‘a more positive campaign of counter-subversion against Communism in foreign countries, in the Colonies and in the United Kingdom.’²³ In

October of that year, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan echoed some of the Chiefs of Staff's concerns, while drawing somewhat less extreme conclusions. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, he argued that new methods needed to be employed to meet the growing threat of subversion overseas from Communists and radical nationalists:

The advance to independence is swift and it is in some of the territories where independence is likely to come very soon that the strategic and economic interests of the United Kingdom are the greatest...For this purpose I think that both the Security Service and MI6 will have to play a greater part than they have hitherto and their efforts will have to be closely coordinated with those of the local British officials. I foresee a requirement in some at least of these territories for a group of persons to operate in the intelligence and counter-subversion fields solely in the interests of the United Kingdom. We cannot rely for this on the local indigenous security services, even where they exist, because they are falling progressively under the control of locally elected ministers and parliamentary assemblies. There is therefore likely to be a clear divergence between the interests and policy of those Ministers and parliaments and those of the United Kingdom.²⁴

This notion of a 'clear divergence' of interests struck at the heart not only of the project of creating a common 'intelligence culture' but of the very idea of an expanding British Commonwealth. It also directly challenged the 'Attlee doctrine'. Even at this stage, MI6 was not entirely excluded from the Commonwealth. It was permitted to offer limited forms of assistance to Commonwealth governments, as when in 1952 it helped to establish the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS).²⁵ MI6 also stationed officers in the 'fortress' colonies of Cyprus and

Singapore, which provided Britain with regional military and intelligence headquarters.²⁶ In general terms, however, it was explicitly prohibited from running its own operations in the Commonwealth and colonies by the Attlee doctrine.

Macmillan acknowledged that the changes he proposed would 'raise the question of the extension of the charters of both the Security Service and MI6 to enable them to act directly in support of United Kingdom interests in these territories.'

Brook was cautious about Macmillan's approach. In terms that the Colonial Office would no doubt have endorsed, he maintained that checking Communism and controlling nationalism could best be achieved primarily through 'sound colonial administration, good police organisation and an effective intelligence system'.²⁷ From the heavily censored copy of his reply which has recently been made available in the National Archives, it seems that Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, shared this scepticism.²⁸ He noted that considerable efforts had been made to implement the Templer Report and that a Committee on Colonial Security was already in existence. He also pointed out that the manpower and financial resources of MI6 placed practical limitations on their ability to expand their sphere of operations. Lennox-Boyd did not, however, object in principle to such an expansion. Rather, he was adamant that any clandestine or covert activity in a colony should be under the formal control of the governor and, by extension, the Colonial Secretary.

Brook agreed that counter-subversion, whether it was carried on in the colonies or in foreign countries, should be under the control of the relevant Minister. He drew up a set of guidelines, which formed the basis for a memorandum circulated by Eden on 14 December to the Ministers concerned.²⁹ This stated:

We should in principle be prepared to use counter-subversion in colonial territories as a means of countering Communist or unhealthy nationalist

movements. This will always be subsidiary to the main methods of preserving a healthy public opinion in the colonies.³⁰

An Official Committee on Counter-Subversion in Colonial Territories was established as a consequence of these discussions, and it met for the first time in March 1956. Operating under the general direction of the Cabinet's Colonial Policy Committee, it was intended to bring together representatives of the Foreign, Colonial and Commonwealth Relations officers and of MI5 and MI6. Its minutes and papers are currently closed.³¹ It is therefore unclear how effective the committee was in producing workable guidelines governing MI6 operations in the Empire/Commonwealth. Yet on the basis of the non-attributable interviews given to Tom Bower by former members of British intelligence, it is clear that the Attlee doctrine was not entirely reversed, and that both the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations Offices continued to resist MI6 activity in the areas for which they were responsible.³² Dick White, the head of MI6 from 1956, was disinclined to challenge the Attlee doctrine. Yet some of his subordinates, notably his deputy, George K Young, and John Bruce Lockhart, MI6 controller for the Middle East and Africa, were dissatisfied with this approach and pushed for a more proactive policy. In seeking to imbue the government with a sense of urgency, Young and Lockhart appear to have by-passed White and pressed their case directly on Macmillan following his assumption of the premiership in January 1957. They also lobbied some of Macmillan's more 'hawkish' Ministers, including Duncan Sandys and Julian Amery. They appear to have had a certain amount of success. During talks with MI6 in 1958, Bob de Quehen, head of the Central African 'Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau', learned, 'They [MI6] are opening up in Guinea and Lagos (against French Africa) and have a new station in the Horn of Africa. They have been in the Sudan

(where they gave advance information of the coup) and in Ethiopia for sometime.³³ Lockhart returned from a trip to Africa at the end of 1959 convinced that the continent was vulnerable to revolutionary movements.³⁴ The following April, de Quehen was promised the assistance of an MI6 liaison officer in Salisbury. At the same meeting he was apparently told, ‘the British Secret Service is training a small intelligence organisation for the Fed[eral] Gov[ernmen]t of Nigeria who say they want to spy on Ghana!!’³⁵ Yet as late as 1960, Lockhart seems to have been frustrated by the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations Offices’ defence of the Attlee Doctrine, a stance that also impeded the establishment of CIA stations in the Commonwealth.³⁶

One source of information that may help to cast some indirect light on the debates that were taking place within the Committee on Counter-Subversion are the records of the Foreign Office’s Information Research Department (IRD), an organisation with links to MI6 created in 1948 to coordinate anti-Communist propaganda around the world.³⁷ The IRD was not bound by the Attlee Doctrine and was active in the Commonwealth and colonies, particularly in counter-insurgency campaigns.³⁸ Yet its methods were clearly viewed with some suspicion by self-governing members of the Commonwealth. As Phillip Deery has recently noted, even the avowedly anti-Communist administration of Robert Menzies in Australia was distinctly wary of the organisation.³⁹ Indeed, in some cases, IRD acted without the knowledge or consent of Commonwealth governments. In India, British information officers were instructed to supply IRD material to local journalists ‘confidentially’, and IRD was keen that the Indian government should not be informed of this.⁴⁰

Actions of this kind threatened to undermine the notion of friendly cooperation implicit in the MI5/CO/CRO intelligence structure. Perhaps because of this, relations with the Colonial Office were far from easy. In November 1948, shortly

after its establishment, a Cabinet Committee on Colonial Information Policy was created.⁴¹ This should have provided the groundwork for smooth cooperation between the CO and the IRD. It is clear from IRD's own files, however, that it failed to do so. On 30 November 1955, just as discussions were underway about an enhanced role for MI6 in the colonies, staff from the IRD met with W T A Cox, head of the Information Department of the Colonial Office. One of the IRD officials present, Hugh Cortazzi, was subsequently scathing about the encounter. He noted that outside South East Asia (where the IRD had been extremely active in the Malayan emergency) 'very little IRD material is used even in the more advanced colonies in West Africa and the Caribbean (on which we concentrated our fire).'⁴² Cortazzi attributed some of the problem to Cox himself who 'gives the impression of not being interested in the IRD aspects of his present job and it was difficult even to arrange a meeting.'

Yet there were obviously more serious structural impediments to cooperation. A number of these related to devolved nature of power within the colonial Empire and to the related problems posed by the movement towards self-government. At the meeting in November 1955, Cox pointed out that there were only three UK information officers stationed in the British colonies, and their other duties limited the time they could spend on IRD work.⁴³ Elsewhere, British public relations officers 'were not in the same position as British Information Officers in foreign countries; their primary function was to promote the interests of the local colonial governments.' As Cox's successor told Cortazzi in December 1956, these colonial governments 'tended to be considerably more independent of the Colonial Office than Embassies [are] of the Foreign Office.'⁴⁴ Hence, just as Lennox-Boyd had insisted that MI6 activities in the colonies should have the approval of their governors, the Colonial Office was concerned that IRD involvement might be resented by colonial

administrations as undermining their authority. By the end of 1956, the situation was further complicated by the fact that movement towards self-government meant that the public relations officers in the colonies 'were, to a very large extent now, responsible to local ministers, some of whom could hardly be regarded as reliable. It was thus extremely difficult for the Colonial Office to operate successfully with IRD material in areas where they did not have a UK Information Officer.'⁴⁵

This concern on the part of the Colonial Office to protect itself and the colonial administrations from anything that could be represented as Foreign Office interference also extended to the question of sharing intelligence with the IRD. From 1951, the CO supplied the IRD with its monthly Colonial Political Intelligence Summaries.⁴⁶ The IRD, however, had little faith in the depth or focus of these surveys. In January 1957, Cortazzi commented, 'The more I read of these dreary reports the more I am impressed by their inadequacy'.⁴⁷ The IRD pressed to be allowed to see the original reports on which these summaries were based, but these requests were refused, apparently at the insistence of the Intelligence and Security Department of the Colonial Office. The IRD went to the extent of appealing to the Permanent Under-Secretaries' Department and the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee in their attempts to gain access to a particular report on British Guiana.⁴⁸ The Colonial Office was clearly concerned that the wider dissemination of confidential information from the colonies within Whitehall might not only undermine its own control over colonial policy making, but might make colonial governments more reluctant to pass information to London.

An even more fundamental area of friction between the IRD and the Colonial Office related to their respective attitudes to the threat of Communism in the colonies. IRD was at pains to acknowledge that Communism and nationalism were distinct

phenomena, and that the latter, properly channelled, could be a bulwark against the former. Nevertheless, it assumed that Communists would actively seek to exploit nationalist movements, an assumption that was also implicit in Macmillan's memorandum of October 1955. In many cases, however, the Colonial Office was keen to dispute this link. As Susan Carruthers has already noted, this divergence of attitude is apparent in the colonial emergencies of the late 1940s and early 1950s. For IRD, the notion of a global Communist threat was very much its '*raison d'être*'.⁴⁹ The Colonial Office, by contrast could often find good local reasons for making a clear and public distinction between a violent challenge to its authority and the phenomenon of international Communism. Even in the Malayan emergency, it was cautious about linking the armed struggle of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) with the assumption of power by the Communists in China lest this should lend legitimacy to the MCP in the eyes of Malaya's Chinese community.⁵⁰ As recently released IRD files reveal, in areas where there was little prospect of a violent challenge to British authority, the Colonial Office was even more dismissive of the notion of a Communist threat. At his meeting with the IRD in November 1955, Cox revealed that 'in some areas a policy decision had been taken not to use anti-Communist material because it might arouse interest in Communism where none existed at the moment.'⁵¹ The Colonial Office gave a clear indication of its distinctly ambivalent attitude towards this issue in its treatment of a 'Handbook on Communism', which had been prepared by IRD for distribution among colonial officials. This was passed to the Colonial Office early in February 1955 for their comments, in the expectation that an agreed text would be ready for distribution in about the middle of the year.⁵² It was considered by Charles Cairstairs, an assistant under-secretary at the CO, who eventually returned it to Cox, complaining that it was

‘too long and too propagandistic in tone’.⁵³ By October 1956, it had still not appeared. Cortazzi complained that, ‘Although the final proof was returned to the Colonial Office some time ago, the handbook has still not been issued. This is inexcusable.’⁵⁴

IRD sometimes interpreted the CO’s apparent indifference to its own activities as a refusal to acknowledge not merely the threat of Communism but even the growth of nationalism. In December 1955, Cortazzi suggested that the Colonial Office’s failure to respond positively to IRD initiatives was due to a

Failure to recognise the threat and to realise the importance of propaganda to counter it. This applies to some officials in the Colonial Office but it is probably even more widespread among the officials in the colonies. I know from my own experience in South-East Asia that many senior colonial officials tend to think in pre-war terms that government consists primarily in keeping law and order and ruling the natives in a paternal way. Many have yet to learn [sic] the rising force of nationalism and to recognise the importance of political and psychological factors.⁵⁵

It seems likely, however, that the attitude towards Communism that the CO displayed in its dealings with the IRD owed less to complacency than to a desire to protect its own control over policy making, and the finely balanced systems of consent and collaboration over which it presided. Indeed, even MI5 itself appears to have been prepared to adopt a rather dismissive attitude to the notion of the Communist threat in the developing world when it felt that its own interests were under threat. As I have argued elsewhere, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the settler-dominated government of the Central African Federation sought to play off MI5 against MI6 as part of its struggle for survival.⁵⁶ Having identified the Foreign Office and its associated agencies as being more sympathetic to its cause than the Colonial Office,

the Federal government actively sought to draw MI6 into the region, and to stress the Federation's value as a bulwark against Communism. In 1960, its efforts were rewarded by the appointment of an MI6 officer to the British High Commission in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. In an encounter with the Federal Prime Minister, Sir Roy Welensky in September 1962, the director-general of MI5, Roger Hollis, appears to have directly challenged Welensky's scare-mongering about the Communist threat to Africa. Hollis (who could hardly be accused of complacency about Communist subversion) claimed to have told Welensky that, although the Soviets efforts were likely to increase as they gained experience of the continent, they were currently 'newcomers in Africa and had a lot to learn.'⁵⁷ He acknowledged the increasing flow of African students to the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow and other Eastern bloc locations, but suggested that they were far less numerous and able than the Africans going to British and American universities. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Hollis's account of his meeting with Welensky relates to the subject of African ministers travelling to the Eastern bloc:

Sir Roy asked me whether I did not think it significant that so many Ministers of the newly independent countries were visiting the Soviet Union. I said this seemed to be natural: the Soviet Union had shown a fantastic development from the backwardness of Russia in 1917 to the present, and obviously African countries wanted to develop very quickly. They wanted to see how this had been done. Furthermore, in colonial times Russia and communism had been forbidden fruit; it was not surprising that with independence they wanted to have a look. I said that I thought a number of the Ministers who went to Russia were well aware that there were dangers in communism and

were alert to this, and that this came from the briefing they had had from us and from their own security authorities over the years.

Liaison between IRD and the Colonial Office clearly improved as the 1950s progressed, not least because Cox's successor as head of information at the CO proved considerable more sympathetic to IRD's activities and to its analysis of the Communist threat. Furthermore, an increase in the number of UK information officers posted in the colonies allowed the IRD to by-pass some of the problems of liaising with public relations officers working for the colonial governments.⁵⁸ In May 1962, an official at the CO actually complimented the IRD on the quantity and quality of material that had recently been produced on the deficiencies of Soviet agriculture.⁵⁹ Yet, even by this stage, plaudits from the CO were sufficiently rare to prompt comment from the IRD, which noted that 'the Colonial Office has not always seen eye to eye with us on the distribution of IRD material in Colonial territories.'⁶⁰

It seems extremely likely that some of the issues that caused friction between the Colonial Office and the IRD in the mid-1950s also served to hamper the efforts of the Committee on Counter-Subversion in Colonial Territories to work out an agreed basis for MI6 involvement in the colonial empire. The system of intelligence gathering constructed by MI5 in conjunction with the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations offices, evolved in the context of a highly devolved power structure. Outside the 'core' members of the UK/USA Agreement, limited cooperation from Commonwealth countries, encouraged by the creation of a common intelligence culture, was as much as those directly responsible for British colonial and Commonwealth policy believed they could reasonably achieve. There was clearly a growing feeling on the part of the Chiefs of Staff, the Foreign Office and its associated propaganda and intelligence organisations that this approach was both

defeatist, and inadequate to counter a growing menace from Communist subversion. Yet the direct involvement of IRD and particularly of MI6 in propaganda and intelligence gathering operations threatened to cut directly across the system created by MI5, with a potentially disruptive impact on Britain's relations with Commonwealth and colonial governments. Indeed, the notion of a 'clear divergence' of interests developing between Britain and her newly independent colonies challenged the whole notion of an evolving Commonwealth, an idea that still carried some weight within Whitehall in the late 1950s.

Competing notions of the proper role of British intelligence in the Commonwealth served to shape the debate about the extent to which Communism represented a threat to countries at or nearing independence. Ronald Hyam has recently argued that 'The whole process of decolonisation is best interpreted within the geopolitical context of the Cold War. The long-term aim with respect to future relations with Afro-Asian countries was to ensure their alignment with the West.... Sir Andrew Cohen, the Colonial Office expert, was worried by 1961 that 'killing communism' seemed to have become the chief objective of African policy, rather than the desirability of preparing stable and viable regimes for independence.'⁶¹ Yet, as we have seen Whitehall did not have a common view on the nature of the Communist threat and the best defence against it, and considerations of departmental self-interest fed into the debate about this. Given that the notion of a Communist threat was being used by the Foreign Office as an excuse for an expansion of its own influence in the Commonwealth, it is hardly surprising that the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations offices should sometimes have sought to down-play its magnitude. The question of the impact of the Cold War upon British decolonisation deserves further study in the light of this competition within the British government.

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Notes

This is very much 'work in progress' and should not be quoted without the permission of the author. Some of the material in this paper is drawn from an earlier article, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture: The View From Central Africa, 1945-1965', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol 17, No. 3 (Autumn 2002), pp.131-162.

¹ See, for example, Keith Jeffrey, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations: Some Reflections on the British Experience', *Intelligence and National Security* 2/1 (1987) pp.118-49; Randall W. Heather 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya 1952-56', *Intelligence and National Security* 5/3 (1990) pp.57-83; David Charters, 'British Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign 1945-47', *Intelligence and National Security* 6/1 (1991) pp.115-135; Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya', *Intelligence and National Security* 14/2 (1999) pp.124-55. When more general books touch on Commonwealth and colonial affairs it is also usually in the context of 'emergency situations'. See Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald, *British Intelligence and Covert Action* (London: Junction 1983); Anthony Verrier *Through the Looking Glass: British Foreign Policy in the Age of Illusions* (London: Jonathan Cape 1983); Richard Deacon, '*C*: A Biography of Sir Maurice Oldfield' (London: Macdonald 1984); Tom Bower, *The Perfect English Spy: Sir Dick White and the Secret War 1935-90* (London: Heinemann 1995); Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate 2000).

² Michael Smith, *New Cloak, Old Dagger: How Britain's Spies Came in from the Cold* (London: Victor Gollancz 1996) pp. 27-8; Richard J. Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain, 1945-1970* (Manchester UP 1998) pp.43-5. For a broader discussion of Anglo-American intelligence cooperation see Jeffrey T. Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties that Bind* (Boston: Unwin Hyman 1990).

³ Bower, pp.219-20

⁴ Note on 'Declaration of SLO' supplied to Governor of Northern Rhodesia, Jan. 1964, DO 183/480.

⁵ See Christopher Andrew, 'The Growth of the Australian Intelligence Community and the Anglo-American Connection', *Intelligence and National Security* 4/2 (1989) pp.213-256.

⁶ 'Prime Minister's Memorandum to the Director-General of Security, being a Directive for the establishment and maintenance of a Security Service', 16 March 1949. ASIO website, www.asio.gov.au/About/Timeline/Content/Directive.htm.

⁷ Cmnd. 2152, *The Denning Report* (London, HMSO, 1963), para 238; Nigel West, *A Matter of Trust* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1982) p.23.

⁸ Richelson and Ball, p.68.

⁹ 'Directive to the Intelligence and Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Federation and the Director of the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau', 11 Dec. 1956, The Papers of Sir Roy Welensky, Rhodes House, Oxford (hereafter 'WP'), 238/6, ff. 29-30.

¹⁰ Richelson and Ball, p.68. The new organisation was known as the New Zealand Security Service. It changed its name to the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service in 1969. For an earlier approach to the Canadian government on this subject by MI5, see Holland to Churchill, 5 Nov. 1951, PREM 11/349.

¹¹ Memorandum for the Prime Minister from the Director General of the Security Service, 14 Nov. 1949, PREM 8/1283.

- ¹² 'Review by the Security Intelligence Adviser of the Development of Intelligence Organisation in Colonial Territories, 1954-1957', Annex to JIC (57) 115, 8 Nov. 1957, Joint Intelligence Committee Papers, PRO, CAB 158/30.
- ¹³ Note by P. H. Dean, JIC (57) 115, 8 Nov. 1957, CAB 158/30.
- ¹⁴ Report on Colonial Security by General Sir Gerald Templer, 23 April 1955, CAB 129/76 CP (55) 89, p.13.
- ¹⁵ 'Review by the Security Intelligence Adviser', CAB 158/30.
- ¹⁶ 'Review by the Security Intelligence Adviser', CAB 158/30.
- ¹⁷ Memorandum for the Prime Minister from the Director General of the Security Service, 18 Oct. 1949, PREM 8/1283.
- ¹⁸ Memorandum for the Prime Minister from the Director General of the Security Service, 18 Oct. 1949, PREM 8/1283.
- ¹⁹ Stella Rimington, *Open Secret: The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5* (London: Hutchinson 2001), p. 261. Rimington attended two during her period as Director General of MI5 from 1992-96.
- ²⁰ Rimington, p. 261.
- ²¹ Report on Colonial Security by General Sir Gerald Templer, 23 April 1955, CAB 129/76 CP (55) 89, p.20.
- ²² Frank Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonization 1945-1963: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (London: 2002).
- ²³ Brook to Eden, 21 Oct. 1955, PREM 11/1582.
- ²⁴ Macmillan to Eden, 19 Oct. 1955, PREM 11/1582.
- ²⁵ Andrew, pp.217-8.
- ²⁶ Philip H J Davies, 'The SIS Singapore Station and the Role of the Far East Controller: Secret Intelligence Structure and Process in Post-War Colonial Administration', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14/4 (1999), pp. 105-129; Deacon, pp.88-108; Dorril, pp.550-557.
- ²⁷ Brook to Eden, 21 Oct. 1955, PREM 11/1582.
- ²⁸ Lennox-Boyd to Eden, 15 Nov. 1955, PREM 11/1582.
- ²⁹ Brook to Prime Minister, 28 Nov. 1955; Draft Memorandum by the Prime Minister, December 1955, PREM 11/1582.
- ³⁰ This paragraph is reproduced verbatim in the Prime Minister's subsequent memorandum.
- ³¹ They are located in CAB 130/114, but are currently retained under section 3.4 of the Public Record Act.
- ³² Bower, pp.219-224.
- ³³ 'London Visit, 18th November – 3rd December', WP 234/4, ff.38-42.
- ³⁴ Bower, p. 221.
- ³⁵ De Quehen to Welensky, 29 April 1960, WP 607/1, ff.21-2.
- ³⁶ Bower, pp. 221-3.
- ³⁷ See especially Paul Lashmar and Oliver James, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War 1948-1977* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 1998); 'IRD: Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department, 1946-48', *Historians, LRD*, No. 9 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1995).
- ³⁸ See Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency 1944-60* (Leicester UP: 1995).
- ³⁹ Phillip Deery, 'Covert Propaganda and the Cold War: Britain and Australia 1948-1955', *The Round Table* 361 (2001) pp.607-21.
- ⁴⁰ Minute by R Murray, 2 May 1949; minute by C F A Warner, 3 May 1949, 2389/9, FO 1110/209.
- ⁴¹ 'IRD: Origins and Establishment', p.14.
- ⁴² Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 6 Dec. 1955, FO 1110/845.
- ⁴³ 'Minutes of a meeting to discuss IRD material and the colonies held on November 30, 1955', FO 1110/845.
- ⁴⁴ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 12 Dec. 1956, FO 1110/1055.
- ⁴⁵ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 12 Dec. 1956, FO 1110/1055
- ⁴⁶ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary', no 1, Jan. 1951, FO 1110/443.
- ⁴⁷ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 4 Jan. 1957, FO 1110/1055
- ⁴⁸ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 3 Jan 1958, FO 1110/1167
- ⁴⁹ Carruthers, p. 265.
- ⁵⁰ Carruthers, p. 80.

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- ⁵¹ 'Minutes of a meeting to discuss IRD material and the colonies held on November 30, 1955', FO 1110/845.
- ⁵² Cortazzi to Williams, 4 Feb. 1955, FO 1110/842.
- ⁵³ 'Minutes of a meeting to discuss IRD material and the colonies held on November 30, 1955', FO 1110/845.
- ⁵⁴ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 11 Oct. 1956, FO 1110/960.
- ⁵⁵ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 6 Dec. 1955, FO 1110/845.
- ⁵⁶ See Philip Murphy, 'Intelligence and Decolonization: The Life and Death of the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau, 1954-63', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29/2 (May 2001), pp. 101-130, and 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture: The View From Central Africa, 1945-1965', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17/3 (Autumn 2002), pp.131-162.
- ⁵⁷ Memorandum by R H Hollis, 21 Sept. 1962, DO 183/214.
- ⁵⁸ Minute by H A H Cortazzi, 3 Jan 1958, FO 1110/1167.
- ⁵⁹ Fry to Barclay, 25 May 1962, PR 10542/20, FO 1110/1558.
- ⁶⁰ Minute by Klatt, 12 June 1962, PR 10542/20, FO 1110/1558.
- ⁶¹ Ronald Hyam, 'The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27/2 (1999), p. 45.